

***TECHNOLOGY
IN SPECIAL
EDUCATION***

.....

**Can Students Teach the Teacher about Computers?
What about a Mentally Retarded Student?**

Michael Leyba



he author has learned that mentally retarded students can teach the teacher about how to use a computer. The discussed creative applications are suggested for learning basic skills and creative thinking.

The suggested student outcomes may be motivation to use when working with special populations. Outcomes may be used as justification for purchasing computer systems which provide enhanced graphics and sound capabilities.

Some students come to the classroom with previous computer experience. They may have used a computer in another class at home or just played video games. Usually, the later is the experience they bring.

Usually their hand and eye coordination with a joystick is far superior to mine. One mentally retarded 13 year old student was able to use the mouse with little instruction through the motivation of playing a game. This student's mouse skills are sufficient to manipulate through most programs. His ability to double click the mouse is something many people take much longer to learn. His skills exceed the majority of new computer users I have seen, especially teachers. My reasoning is that he is not afraid to break the computer and is motivated to play.

My special education students are generally not afraid to play with the computer or afraid that they will break the computer. This enables them to better concentrate on learning. This is to be compared to adults who constantly worry about breaking the computer or fear someone will think they are stupid or inadequate.

I believe the best way to further computer skills for the beginner is to use graphics programs to gain mouse dexterity and have fun at the same time. It also brings out the creativity in us. Graphics programs are my student's favorite computer program.

I have encouraged using paint and graphics programs such as Kid Pix, to enhance their fine motor skills. I would recommend these programs for all students for further development of their fine motor coordination. It is fun and creative.

The teacher can either let the student have free rein or give directions to the student. I believe the best way is to let the students play. They learn through their successes and mistakes. In fact, my students love making mistakes. They like to explode the picture with the little bomb, which is part of the program intended to erase the screen. I sometimes have to jump in quickly in order to save their work before they blow it to smithereens.

If the student needs guidance or is having problems then I give them direction and assistance. I would start simple and then build on their knowledge to learn the complex.

If needed, tell them to draw lines going up and down. First, straight lines, then curved lines. Then graduate to boxes and circles. Then have them fill them in with colors. After that you may go to more advanced shapes. You then could have them combine shapes to make a picture. Such as a triangle for a roof of a house. A rectangle for the house frame. Three dimensional drawings to show depth. It is unlimited where you could go with this.

I take the students' pictures and use them as our screen saver in the After Dark slide show folder. The kids love to see their work shown off.

I encourage the use of printing programs such as Print Shop. They make signs and greeting cards for their friends and family. They love making banners for special occasions. They get excited about giving to others.

Some teachers and administrators may feel the two examples above are play. Many times they are. However, the goals and objectives of the students are satisfied through using the above two programs: Kid Pix and Print Shop. The children simply have fun while learning. The next example will teach even more complex subjects and may require more assistance.

We use the HyperCard multimedia authoring development program to create projects. It has the ability to combine graphics, sound, and text to describe just about anything. We've been working on the history of our town, Rankin. The children are doing the research about who the mayor is, favorite recipes, history, what stores are in town, what events would be of interest to others, etc. It is a record of the past, present and future of our community. Once completed we plan to show it off to the town at the local museum. We will also sell printed copies of it to the townspeople as a fund-raiser to purchase more computer equipment or programs.

.....